

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Thomas James Owen's letters and diary came to the Historical Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, through the efforts of several people. Paul Trap, a history teacher in Grand Haven, Michigan, mentioned the Owen papers to Gordon Olson, the historian for the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Both men realized the importance of the papers, and Olson suggested that Owen's descendants, Shirley and Charles Millard, donate them to the Historical Division. They agreed, and the Historical Division, after seeing the papers, decided to publish them.

Between 8 April 1862 and 2 May 1865, Thomas Owen wrote the **55** letters that appear in this publication to his family in New York. In these letters, Owen often used the salutation "Dear Friends at Home," which the Historical Division chose for the title of this book. The collection of Owen's papers in the custody of the Historical Division includes some letters that he wrote long after the Civil War and others that he received from family and friends during the conflict. These few additional letters were not included because they add nothing to the story of Owen's role in the Civil War. Owen apparently wrote other letters home during the war, but the Historical Division has not located them.

The diary extends from 29 April to 18 May 1864. It covers the early stages of the Army of the Potomac's 1864 spring offensive. The Historical Division has not found any other diary entries.

The letters and diary were generally legible and easy to transcribe. In a few cases, however, including one soiled part of the diary, I could not transcribe some words. I have indicated these with blank underlined spaces.

Owen sometimes wrote in haste and made careless errors. In some instances, he left out words or suffixes. If I could not determine what the word or suffix was, I left a space which I framed in brackets. When I discovered what was missing, I included it in brackets. Also, Owen wrote some phrases or sentences and then drew lines through them. When possible and worthwhile, I transcribed these, and they appear with a line through them.

The diary and letters contained numerous spelling mistakes. Owen used "wer" for "were," "fer" for "for," and "verry" for "very." He misspelled many other words, particularly the names of people and places. Like most Civil War soldiers, he seldom saw the names of people or places in print. He usually heard them spoken and wrote the names phonetically. When Owen wrote "Johnson" for "Johnston," "Fort Steavenson," for "Fort Stevenson," and "Seymer" for "Seymour," he spelled them as well as he could. Although the various misspellings are interesting and sometimes humorous, for the sake of clarity I have corrected all of them.



Captain W. W. FOLWELL.

Embossment on Thomas James Owen's stationery.

Generally, I have provided annotated footnotes for people and places mentioned in Owen's writings. For place names that appear in Dallas Irvine et al., *Military Operations of the Civil War: A Guide-Index to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-1865* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968-1980); in the indexes to the War Department's *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 189 1-1895); or in the *Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World Atlas* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1971), I refer the reader to the appropriate pages of these publications for information. In some cases I have provided additional information pertaining to the events, operations, and experiences that Owen described.

Like numerous Civil War soldiers who wrote letters and diaries, Owen simply jotted down his thoughts on paper. For readability, I have arranged the resultant phrases in sentences and paragraphs. Throughout his writings, Owen underlined certain words and included others in parentheses. I have left those as I found them. However, I have substituted "and" for ampersands (&) and corrected unwarranted capitalization. Although Owen used the contemporary term "pontoon," I changed it to the modern usage of "ponton. "

I received valuable advice and assistance from numerous individuals and institutions. John Greenwood, Chief of the Historical Division, enthusiastically endorsed the project and provided encouragement. Two colleagues, Paul K. Walker and Frank N. Schubert, helped me in various

ways ranging from transcription of difficult words to moral support. Michael Musick, my former colleague at the National Archives and a dedicated Civil War scholar, generously assisted me in locating information for some of the annotations. Others who provided useful suggestions and information were John Y. Simon, editor of the *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*; William Lay, Jr., curator of the Tioga County Historical Society in Owego, New York; Gordon Olson, city historian of Grand Rapids, Michigan; Richard Sommers, archivist at the U.S. Army Military History Institute in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; and various historians of the National Park Service at the Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania and Petersburg National Military Parks.

Archivists Maida Loescher, Mike Musick, Elaine Everly, Charles Shaughanessy, and John Dwyer ably assisted me in locating documents in the National Archives. The staff of the Minnesota Historical Society searched the William Watts Folwell Papers and located important documents and 'photographs, including a picture of Owen. Employees of the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress helped me find many pertinent illustrations.

Shirley and Charles Millard, Paul Trap, and Gordon Olson arranged for the donation of the Thomas J. Owen Papers to the Historical Division. Without their help, publication of the Owen letters and diary would have been impossible.